

Foundation of All Good Qualities

Tenth teaching

Geshe Lobsang Dhonyoe

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Dhargyey Buddhist Centre

Taking the Essence of Human Life

To resume from where we left off, tonight we are going to talk about a second section called 'how to extract the essence of this rare purposeful human life which is so short-lived.' Last week and the week before that we were talking about how human life is difficult to find causally speaking, how it is difficult to find in terms of analogy and in terms of number as well. Now, after having covered guru devotion and precious human life, the second main section is how to take the essence of human life.

This is the third stanza, in which there are eight lines starting with, *"Body and life are as fleeting as bubbles of water."* No doubt, this life of leisure and freedom for spiritual upliftment and growth is quite precious and wonderful. Unfortunately, as these two stanzas point out, life is so fleeting. Therefore it says in the commentary that although we have achieved such a wonderful human body, this life doesn't last long, it's constantly in motion and the passage of each moment takes us closer to the end of life, death.

When it says, *"Every moment takes us closer to death,"* this word every moment is the definition of impermanent phenomena. What is impermanent phenomenon? It is a functional phenomenon that changes every moment. Human life, when we are not circumspect and we are casual, a life of hundred years seems to be quite long. But in comparison to the period of an aeon, a hundred years is as short as a second. Thus, the passage of every second nibs at the given longevity of 100 years.

Here in the greater context of phenomenology, things are either existent or non-existent. Concerning existent phenomena they are either permanent, not changing moment by moment; as permanent they would last for ever and therefore be timeless. Alternately, things are impermanent, such that every moment eats away at the functional phenomenon and doesn't make it last for any duration. If only our life, an existent phenomenon, was permanent then there would be no reason to be spiritual. Unfortunately life is not a permanent unchanging phenomenon, it is incessantly undergoing change. As a result of that, every year a certain amount of life expectancy is taken away from us and thus by this constant pattern of life being consumed by the passage of time, minutes and seconds we are drawn closer to death.

So what about death? At death what is of benefit? At death and beyond death no position, relationships, not even one's body is of any benefit. The only thing, according to the teachings, that is of real benefit is virtues collected or done by one.

Not only is life by nature impermanent, but there are external circumstances acting up on life. Therefore it says, external adverse circumstances like sickness, spirits, interfering forces they are all just waiting to ambush. They are waiting like a pack of dogs waiting for a *torma* to be thrown away. These external conditions are awaiting the opportunity to attack life. On the part of one's own life, it is as short lived and ephemeral as bubbles of water. So delicate that the bubble of this life doesn't have the strength to withstand a prick by conditions. If you prick the bubble, it just collapses. In the same way, the bubble of our life is so delicate that even the slightest condition like if one is pricked by a thorn, that thorn could become a fatal condition that could end one's life.

When somebody is said to have some interference then to appease the interfering forces, some ritual *tormas* are made, rituals are performed and then they are thrown. As soon as they are thrown, thrown to invisible interferences, but the dogs just wait and gobble it up. In the same way the lord of death is just waiting for his chance.

Imagine a person has a given lifespan of 100 years. But that life could be cut short by five years upon meeting adverse circumstances, interfering forces. Although it might sound superstitious, Tibetan people go to the astrologer. Of course you have to give all your data to them and then they calculate whether your life is going to have interference and then if they see some interferences in the future, they also recommend certain sutras to be read, certain pujas to be performed. When those things recommended by the astrologer are done, the given lifespan could be lived in full.

The text goes on to say, that we need to contemplate and reflect on how death and impermanence will strike one any time, quite soon. Concerning this point, that is to bring to heart the ephemeral nature of life. We need to think about the three roots, nine reasons and three resolutions about death. These points are raised in all different Lamrim texts. Therefore, going through three roots, nine reasons each root having three reasons at the end of which, you decide to do three things. You come to realise that one day one will die, but also think about how uncertain it is as to when death will strike one down or one will die. And further, at death and beyond then we need to think that no amount of wealth, resources, no number of relations we have will be able to save us from dying. Ultimately even this body is unable to save one. In fact, it is this body that kills one. Even this very body cannot save one and we need to think about these three roots, nine reasons and three resolutions time and again.

So here at the end of having contemplated these it is no good to just feel afraid of death and do nothing about it. Concerning this, a Tibetan master omniscient Butoun Rinpoche says this life has no long duration, soon it will end. Like animals being driven in a truck so the slaughterhouse, every moment we are getting closer with the turn of every wheel the animals are getting closer to the slaughterhouse. The long and the short of all of this is death is absolutely certain, the time of death absolutely uncertain and when we die nothing except Dharma is of benefit. When we talk about death, do you feel depressed?

Debate: phenomenology

So I'm going to now debate. A short time ago, the text talked about momentary change. Does it follow that if something is impermanent, it is momentary or momentarily changing? Does it follow that if something is impermanent, it is momentary? Or, conversely speaking if something is impermanent, does it follow that it is momentary?

Audience: Yes to both.

Geshe-la: A vase is a functional reality is it? Therefore is it impermanent?

Audience: Yes.

Geshe-la: Is it momentarily changing?

Audience: Yes.

Geshe-la: What about the isolate of the vase?

Some say '*dok-pa*' (meaning 'isolate') is the opposite of the 'non-vase.' Vase and the non-vase, the opposite of the non-vase.

What is a vase? In debate, everything has a definition. It's the definition that you debate and you're trying to defend and have no loopholes in the definition. What is the definition of vase? A vase is a functional reality with a flat base, bulbous stomach which holds water. That is a vase.

What is the isolate of a base? The isolate of the vase is none other than the vase itself. It is none other than the phenomenon itself. The isolate of a base has four equivalents: if x is y, y is z... like that.

Broadly speaking, functional things are an existent. What is the isolate of a functional entity? None other than the functional entity. What is the isolate of Ani Kunzang – none other than Ani Kunzang. You said to me that Losang is a functional reality. Yes. And you said Losang is impermanent. But now I challenge you, Losang is not impermanent. Losang is permanent.

Why? Because the isolate of Losang, of each and every impermanent phenomena, is permanent. Functional phenomena themselves are impermanent but their isolates are permanent.

Why? Why is the isolate of Losang permanent? It is really high conceptual. The isolate of the vase is permanent because it has four equivalent relationships: with Losang, one with Losang; Losang that has become one with losang; and ...

Losang: I asked Geshe-la why is 'oneness with Losang' permanent. Geshe-la says it is because for all knowable phenomena, between permanent and impermanent it is permanent that dominates.

Geshe-la: On the one hand you said the vase, car is impermanent. On the other hand you say the isolate is permanent. Why do they say that now?

We generally say that functioning things, functional realities are necessarily impermanent – *ngo-po* (functioning things) are generally said to be impermanent. But the isolate of the *ngo-po* is permanent.

So *ngo-po*, the phenomenon, is impermanent. But the isolate of *ngo-po* is permanent. But if you ask me to give an example if an isolate of *ngo-po*, it's the *ngo-po* itself. The phenomenon is impermanent, the isolate of the phenomenon is permanent. What is the example of the isolate of the phenomenon? The phenomenon itself. Now is it permanent or impermanent? Is the isolate of the phenomenon permanent or impermanent?

If you ask, what is an example of the isolate of the phenomenon? The phenomenon itself. Now, we need to have a clear delineation to say whether it falls in the category of permanent or impermanent. The question is, is the isolate of the phenomenon permanent or impermanent?

Audience: Permanent.

Geshe-la: But I would argue it's not permanent because it's impermanent. Because the isolate of the phenomenon is the phenomenon. That's why it is impermanent.

Please get four things. With regard to the vase, there are four points of equivalence in terms of isolates.

- One with the vase.
- A vase that has become one with the vase
- The thing which is defined by the definition... the vase is that which is defined by the definition of "that which is bulbous, flat-based and holds water."
- The vase also has three imputed entities of flat-bottomed, bulbous, holding water.

Of these four, the last three are impermanent. Only the first one, one with the vase, is permanent.

Let's say the isolate of the vase is permanent. Posit an example of that isolate? The vase itself. Now, is that permanent? Again, the isolate of the vase is none other than the vase itself. That which is the example of the isolate of the vase, is it permanent or impermanent?

The isolate of the vase, if you ask what is it? It's the vase itself. But is it permanent or impermanent?

One is permanent, but that which is 'one' is not necessarily permanent. Then the person says give me an example of that. You have to come with an example: something that is one but not permanent. Is one permanent?

Losang: No.

Geshe-la: One is generally permanent. But that which is one is not necessarily permanent.

Why is one permanent? Because the isolate of anything has four properties, which is permanent.

That's why you could also say the isolate of a thing is permanent, but if it is an isolate of a thing, it is not permanent.

Then you could say the isolate is permanent, just as one is permanent, the isolate is permanent. But that which is one is not necessarily permanent, it could be impermanent. Give an example? The vase, the table and so on.

The isolate is permanent, that which is isolate is not necessarily permanent. Give an example? The book, as the book is that which is the isolate of the book.

It really make us think, it helps us consider a thing from different perspective and angles rather than looking and thinking from one angle and making all kinds of judgement. Therefore we won't be so credulous to what people say. It would help us to become more circumspect, wiser and more rationale. It really promotes critical thinking.

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Losang: This notion of isolate is so important. At the logic level we're dealing with vase and so on. When we talk about Madyamika philosophy, the two truths, ultimate and conventional truths are of one nature but different isolates. Therefore form and emptiness of form are one by nature, but different isolates.

Geshe-la: For example, a pillar and a vase are one nature in terms of impermanence. In that, they are one, they are of the same nature. They are not one by nature, they are of the same nature. The pillar and the vase in terms of their impermanent nature, they are one. But in terms of the isolate, what is the isolate of the vase? The vase. The isolate of the pillar is the pillar. Therefore the isolate of the vase can't be the isolate of the pillar. They share the same nature, but their isolates are different.

So all of us here have one nature of being impermanent, of being empty of inherent existence, in such a manner we are all the same. We are all impermanent. But the isolate of each of us is just oneself, individually speaking. Geshe-la and Losang are impermanent by nature, they are same. But if they share the same nature, are they absolutely the same? No. the isolates are different. Who is the isolate of Losang? It has to be just Losang. Geshe-la can't supersede the isolate of Losang.